

## A Note on George the Fourth

By Max Beerbohm

THEY say that when King George was dying, a special form of prayer for his recovery, composed by one of the Archbishops, was read aloud to him, and that his Majesty, after saying Amen "thrice, with great fervour," begged that his thanks might be conveyed to its author. To the student of royalty in modern times there is something rather suggestive in this incident. I like to think of the drug-scented room at Windsor, and of the King, livid and immobile among his pillows, waiting, in superstitious awe, for the near moment when he must stand, a spirit, in the presence of a perpetual King. I like to think of him following the futile prayer with eyes and lips, and then, custom resurgent in him and a touch of pride that, so long as the blood moved ever so little in his veins, he was still a king, expressing a desire that the dutiful feeling and admirable taste of the Prelate should receive a suitable acknowledgment. It would have been impossible for a real monarch like George, even after the gout had turned his thoughts heavenward, really to abase himself before his Maker. But he could, so to say, treat with him, as he might have treated with a fellow-sovereign, long after diplomacy was quite useless. How strange it must be to be a king! How delicate and difficult a task it is to judge him! So far

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as I know, no fair attempt has been made to form an estimate of George the Fourth. The hundred and one eulogies and lampoons, published irresponsibly during and immediately after his reign, are not worth a wooden hoop in Hades. Mr. Percy Fitzgerald has published a history of George's reign, in which he has so artistically subordinated his own personality to his subject, that I can scarcely find from beginning to end of the two bulky volumes a single opinion expressed, a single idea, a single deduction from the admirably arranged facts. All that most of us know of George is from Thackeray's brilliant denunciation. Now, I yield to few in my admiration of Thackeray's powers. He had a charming style. We never find him searching for the *mot juste* as for a needle in a bottle of hay. Could he have looked through a certain window by the river at Croisset, or in the quadrangle at Brasenose, how he would have laughed! He blew on his pipe, and words came tripping round him, like children, like pretty little children who are perfectly drilled for the dance, or came, did he will it, treading in their precedence, like kings, gloomily. And I think it is to the credit of the reading mob that, by reason of his beautiful style, all that he said was taken for the truth, without questioning. But truth after all is eternal, and style transient, and now that Thackeray's style is becoming, if I may say so, a trifle 1860, it may not be amiss that we should inquire whether his estimate of George is in substance and fact worth anything at all. It seems to me that, as in his novels, so in his history of the four Georges, Thackeray made no attempt at psychology. He dealt simply with types. One George he insisted upon regarding as a buffoon, another as a yokel. The Fourth George he chose to hold up for reprobation as a drunken, vapid cad. Every action, every phase of his life that went to disprove this view, he either suppressed

suppressed or distorted utterly. "History," he would seem to have chuckled, "has nothing to do with the First Gentleman. But I will give him a niche in Natural History. He shall be king of the Beasts." He made no allowance for the extraordinary conditions under which any monarch finds himself, none for the unfortunate circumstances by which George was from the first hampered. He judged him as he judged Barnes Newcome and all the scoundrels he created. Moreover, he judged him by the moral standard of the Victorian Age. In fact he applied to his subject the wrong method in the wrong manner, and at the wrong time. And yet every one has taken him at his word. I feel that my essay may be scouted as a paradox; but I hope that many may recognise that I am not, out of mere boredom, endeavouring to stop my ears against popular platitude, but rather, in a spirit of real earnestness, to point out to the mob how it has been cruel to George. I do not despair of success. I think I shall make converts. For the mob is notoriously fickle, and so occasionally cheers the truth.

None, at all events, will deny that England to-day stands otherwise than she stood a hundred and thirty-two years ago, when George was born. We to-day are living a decadent life. All the while that we are prating of progress, we are really so deteriorate! There is nothing but feebleness in us. Our youths who spend their days in trying to build up their constitutions by sport or athletics, and their evenings in undermining them with poisonous and dyed drinks, our daughters who are ever searching for some new quack remedy for new imaginary megrim, what strength is there in them? We have our societies for the prevention of this and the promotion of that and the propagation of the other, because there are no individuals among us. Our sexes are already nearly assimilate. Real women are becoming nearly as rare as real ladies,  
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and it is only at the music halls that we are privileged to see strong men. We are born into a poor, weak age. We are not strong enough to be wicked, and the Nonconformist Conscience makes cowards of us all.

But this was not so in the days when George was walking by his tutor's side in the gardens of Kew or of Windsor. London must have been a splendid place in those days—full of life and colour and wrong and revelry. There was no absurd press nor vestry to see that everything should be neatly ordered, nor to protect the poor at the expense of the rich. Every man had to shift for himself and, in consequence, men were, as Mr. Clement Scott would say, manly, and women, as Mr. Clement Scott would say, womanly. A young man of wealth and family in that period found open to him a vista of such license as had been unknown to any since the *barbatuli* of the Roman Empire. To spend the early morning with his valet, gradually assuming the rich apparel that was not then tabooed by a false sumptuary standard; to saunter round to White's for ale and tittle-tattle and the making of wagers; to attend a "drunken *déjeûner*" in honour of "*la très belle Rosaline*" or the Strappini; to drive a friend out into the country in his pretty curricule, "followed by two well-dressed and well-mounted grooms, of singular elegance certainly," and stop at every tavern on the road to curse the host for not keeping better ale and a wench of more charm; to reach St. James' in time for a random toilet and so off to dinner. Which of *our* dandies could survive a day of pleasures such as this? Which would be ready, dinner done, to scamper off again to Ranelagh and dance and skip and sup in the rotunda there? Yet the youth of this period would not dream of going to bed before he had looked in at White's or Crockford's for a few hours' *faro*.

This was the kind of life that young George found opened to him,

him, when, in his nineteenth year, he at length was given an establishment of his own in Buckingham House. How his young eyes must have sparkled, and with what glad gasps must he have taken the air of freedom into his lungs. Rumour had long been busy with the confounded surveillance under which his childhood had been passed. A paper of the time says significantly that "the Prince of Wales, with a spirit which does him honour, has three times requested a change in that system." For a long time King George had postponed permission for his son to appear at any balls, and the year before had only given it, lest he should offend the Spanish Minister, who begged it as a personal favour. I know few pictures more pathetic than that of George, then an overgrown boy of fourteen, tearing the childish frill from around his neck and crying to one of the royal servants, "See how they treat me!" Childhood has always seemed to me the tragic period of life—to be subject to the most odious espionage at the one age when you never dream of doing wrong, to be deceived by your parents, thwarted of your smallest wish, oppressed by the terrors of manhood and of the world to come, and to believe, as you are told, that childhood is the only happiness known: all this is quite terrible. And all Royal children, of whom I have read, particularly George, seem to have passed through greater trials in childhood than do the children of any other class. Mr. Fitzgerald, hazarding for once an opinion, thinks that "the stupid, odious, German, sergeant-system of discipline that had been so rigorously applied, was, in fact, responsible for the blemishes of the young Prince's character." Even Thackeray, in his essay upon George III., asks what wonder that the son, finding himself free at last, should have plunged, without looking, into the vortex of dissipation. In Torrens's "Life of Lord Melbourne" we learn that Lord Essex, riding one day with the King, met the young prince wearing a wig, and that the culprit, being sternly

sternly reprimanded by his father, replied that he had "been ordered by his doctor to wear a wig, for he was subject to cold." Whereupon the King, whether to vent the aversion he already felt for his son or in complacence at the satisfactory result of his discipline, turned to Lord Essex and remarked, "A lie is ever ready when it is wanted." George never lost this early-engrained habit of lies. It is to George's childish fear of his guardians that we must trace that extraordinary power of bamboozling his courtiers, his ministry and his mistresses that distinguished him through his long life. It is characteristic of the man that he should himself have bitterly deplored his own untruthfulness. When, in after years, he was consulting Lady Spencer upon the choice of a governess for his child he made this remarkable speech, "Above all, she must be taught the truth. You know that I don't speak the truth and my brothers don't, and I find it a great defect, from which I would have my daughter free. *We have been brought up badly, the Queen having taught us to equivocate.*" You may laugh at the picture of the little chubby, curly-headed fellows learning to equivocate at their mother's knee, but you must remember that the wisest master of ethics himself, in his theory of ἕξις ἀποδείκτικαι, similarly raised virtues, such as telling the truth, to the level of regular accomplishments, and before you judge poor George harshly, in his entanglements of lying, remember the cruelly unwise education he had undergone.

However much we may deplore this exaggerated tyranny, by reason of its evil effect upon his moral nature, we cannot but feel glad that it existed, to afford a piquant contrast to the life awaiting him. Had he passed through the callow dissipations of Eton and Oxford, like other young men of his age, he would assuredly have lacked much of that splendid pent vigour with which he rushed headlong into London life. He was so young and so handsome,  
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and so strong, that can we wonder if all the women fell at his feet? "The graces of his person," says one whom he honoured by an intrigue, "the irresistible sweetness of his smile, the tenderness of his melodious, yet manly voice, will be remembered by me till every vision of this changing scene are forgotten. The polished and fascinating ingenuousness of his manners contributed not a little to enliven our promenade. He sang with exquisite taste, and the tones of his voice, breaking on the silence of the night, have often appeared to my entranced senses like more than mortal melody." But besides his graces of person, he had a most delightful wit, he was a scholar who could bandy quotations with Fox or Sheridan; and, like the young men of to-day, he knew all about Art. He spoke French, Italian, and German perfectly, and Crossdill had taught him the violoncello. At first, as was right for one of his age, he cared more for the pleasures of the table and of the ring, for cards and love. He was wont to go down to Ranelagh surrounded by a retinue of bruisers—rapscallions, such as used to follow Clodius through the streets of Rome, and he loved to join in the scuffles like any commoner. He learnt to box from Angelo, and was considered by some to be a fine performer. On one occasion, too, at an *exposition d'escrime*, he handled the foils against the *maitre*, and "was highly complimented upon his graceful postures." In fact, in spite of his accomplishments, he seems to have been a thoroughly manly young fellow. He was just the kind of figure-head Society had long been in need of. A certain lack of tone had crept into the amusements of the *haut monde*, and this was doubtless due to the lack of an acknowledged leader. The King was not yet mad, but he was always bucolic, and socially out of the question. So at the coming of his son Society broke into a gallop. Balls and masquerades were given in his honour night after night. Good Samaritans must have

approved when they found that at these entertainments great ladies and courtesans brushed beautiful shoulders in utmost familiarity, but those who delighted in the high charm of society doubtless shook their heads. We need not, however, find it a flaw in George's social bearing that he did not check this kind of freedom. At the first, as a young man full of life, of course he took everything as it came, joyfully. No one knew better than he did, in later life, that there is a time for laughing with great ladies and a time for laughing with courtesans. But as yet it was not possible for him to exert influence. How great that influence became I will indicate later on.

I like to think of him as he was at this period, charging about, in pursuit of pleasure, like a young bull. The splendid taste for building had not yet come to him. His father would not hear of him patronising the turf. But already he was implected with a passion for dress, and seems to have erred somewhat on the side of dressing up, as is the way of young men. It is fearful to think of him, as Cyrus Redding saw him, "arrayed in deep-brown velvet, silver embroidered, with cut-steel buttons, and a gold net thrown over all." Before that "gold net thrown over all," all the mistakes of his after-life seem to me to grow almost insignificant. Time, however, toned his too florid sense of costume, and we should at any rate be thankful that his imagination never deserted him. All the delightful munditiæ that we find in the contemporary "fashion-plates for gentlemen" can be traced to George himself. His were the much-approved "quadruple stock of great dimension," the "cocked grey-beaver," the pantaloons of mauve silk "negligently crinkled" and any number of other little poms and foibles of the kind. As he grew older and was obliged to abandon many of his more vigorous pastimes, he grew more and more enamoured of the pleasures of the wardrobe. He would  
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spend hours, it is said, in designing coats for his friends and liveries for his servants, and even uniforms. Nor did he ever make the mistake of giving away outmoded clothes to his valets, but kept them to form what must have been the finest collection of clothes that has been seen in modern times. With a sentimentality that is characteristic of him he would often, as he sat, crippled by gout, in his room at Windsor, direct his servant to bring him this or that coat, which he had worn ten or twenty or thirty years before, and, when it was brought to him, spend much time in laughing or sobbing over the memories that lay in its folds. It is pleasant to know that George, during his long and various life, never forgot a coat, however long ago worn, however seldom.

But in the early days of which I speak he had not yet touched that self-conscious note which, in manner and mode of life, as well as in costume, he was to touch later. He was too violently enamoured of all around him to think very deeply of himself. But he had already realised the tragedy of the voluptuary, which is, after a little time, not that he must go on living, but that he cannot live in two places at once. We have, at this end of the century, tempered this tragedy by the perfection of railways, and it is possible for that splendid exemplar of the delectable life, our good Prince, whom Heaven bless, to waken to the sound of the Braemar bagpipes, while the music of Mdlle. Guilbert's latest song, cooed over the footlights of the Concerts Parisiens, still rings in his ears. But in the time of our Prince's illustrious great-uncle there were not railways; and we find George perpetually driving, for wagers, to Brighton and back (he had already acquired that taste for Brighton which was one of his most loveable qualities) in incredibly short periods of time. The rustics who lived along the road were well accustomed to the sight of a high, tremulous  
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phaeton, flashing past them, and the crimson face of the young prince bending over the horses. There is something absurd in representing George as, even before he came of age, a hardened and cynical profligate, an Elagabalus in trousers. His blood flowed fast enough through his veins. All his escapades were those of a healthful young man of the time. Need we blame him if he sought, every day, to live faster and more fully?

In a brief essay like this, I cannot attempt to write, as I hope one day to do, in any detail a history of George's career, during the time when he was successively Prince of Wales and Regent and King. Merely is it my wish at present to examine some of the principal accusations that have been brought against him, and to point out in what ways he has been harshly and hastily judged. Perhaps the greatest indignation against him was, and is to this day, felt by reason of his treatment of his two wives, Mrs. Fitzherbert and Queen Caroline. There are some scandals that never grow old, and I think the story of George's married life is one of them. I can feel it. It has vitality. Often have I wondered whether the blood with which the young Prince's shirt was covered when Mrs. Fitzherbert first was induced to visit him at Carlton House, was merely red paint, or if, in a frenzy of love, he had truly gashed himself with a razor. Certain it is that his passion for the virtuous and obdurate lady was a very real one. Lord Holland describes how the Prince used to visit Mrs. Fox, and there indulge in "the most extravagant expressions and actions—rolling on the floor, striking his forehead, tearing his hair, falling into hysterics, and swearing that he would abandon the country, forego the crown, &c." He was indeed still a child, for royalties, not being ever brought into contact with the realities of life, remain young longer than most people. He had a truly royal lack of self-control, and  
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was unable to bear the idea of being thwarted in any wish. Every day he sent off couriers to Holland, whither Mrs. Fitzherbert had retreated, imploring her to return to him, offering her formal marriage. At length, as we know, she yielded to his importunity and returned. It is difficult indeed to realise exactly what was Mrs. Fitzherbert's feeling in the matter. The marriage must be, as she knew, illegal, and would lead, as Charles James Fox pointed out in his powerful letter to the Prince, to endless and intricate difficulties. For the present she could only live with him as his mistress. If, when he reached the legal age of twenty-five, he were to apply to Parliament for permission to marry her, how could permission be given, when she had been living with him irregularly? Doubtless, she was flattered by the attentions of the Heir to the Throne, but, had she really returned his passion, she would surely have preferred "any other species of connection with His Royal Highness to one leading to so much misery and mischief." Really to understand her marriage, one must look at the portraits of her that are extant. That beautiful and silly face explains much. One can well fancy such a lady being pleased to live after the performance of a mock-ceremony with a prince for whom she felt no passion. Her view of the matter can only have been social, for, in the eyes of the Church, she could only live with the Prince as his mistress. Society, however, once satisfied that a ceremony of some kind had been enacted, never regarded her as anything but his wife. The day after Fox, inspired by the Prince, had formally denied that any ceremony had taken place, "the knocker of her door," to quote her own complacent phrase, "was never still." The Duchesses of Portland, Devonshire, and Cumberland were among her visitors.

Now, much pop-limbo has been talked about the Prince's denial of the marriage. I grant that it was highly improper

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to marry Mrs. Fitzherbert at all. But George was always weak and wayward, and he did, in his great passion, marry her. That he should afterwards deny it officially seems to me to have been utterly inevitable. His denial did her not the faintest damage, as I have pointed out. It was, so to speak, an official quibble, rendered necessary by the circumstances of the case. Not to have denied the marriage in the House of Commons would have meant ruin to both of them. As months passed, more serious difficulties awaited the unhappily wedded pair. The story of the Prince's great debts and desperation need not be repeated. It was clear that there was but one way of getting his head above water, and that was to yield to his father's wishes and contract a real marriage with a foreign princess. Fate was dogging his footsteps relentlessly. Placed as he was, George could not but offer to marry, as his father willed. It is well, also, to remember that George was not ruthlessly and suddenly turning his shoulder upon Mrs. Fitzherbert. For some time before the British plenipotentiary went to fetch him a bride from over the waters, his name had been associated with that of the beautiful and unscrupulous Countess of Jersey.

Poor George! Half-married to a woman whom he no longer worshipped, compelled to marry a woman whom he was to hate at first sight! Surely we should not judge a prince harshly. "Princess Caroline very *gauche* at cards," "Princess Caroline very *missish* at supper," are among the entries made in his diary by Lord Malmesbury while he was at the little German Court. I can conceive no scene more tragic than that of her presentation to the Prince, as related by the same nobleman. "I, accordingly to the established etiquette," so he writes, "introduced the Princess Caroline to him. She, very properly, in consequence of my saying it was the right mode of proceeding, attempted to kneel

kneel to him. He raised her gracefully enough, and embraced her, said barely one word, turned round, retired to a distant part of the apartment, and, calling to me, said: 'Harris, I am not well: pray get me a glass of brandy.' At dinner that evening, in the presence of her betrothed, the Princess was "flippant, rattling, affecting wit." Poor George, I say again! Deportment was his ruling passion, and his bride did not know how to behave. Vulgarity—hard, implacable, German vulgarity—was in everything she did to the very day of her death. The marriage was solemnised on Wednesday, April 8th, 1795, and the royal bridegroom was drunk.

So soon as they were separated, George became implected with a morbid hatred for his wife, that was hardly in accord with his light and variant nature, and shows how bitterly he had been mortified by his marriage of necessity. It is sad that so much of his life should have been wasted in futile strainings after divorce. Yet we can scarcely blame him for seizing upon every scrap of scandal that was whispered of his wife. Besides his not unnatural wish to be free, it was derogatory to the dignity of a Prince and a Regent that his wife should be living an eccentric life at Blackheath with a family of singers named Sapio. Indeed, Caroline's conduct during this time was as indiscreet as ever. Wherever she went she made ribald jokes about her husband, "in such a voice that all, by-standing, might hear." "After dinner," writes one of her servants, "Her Royal Highness made a wax figure as usual, and gave it an amiable pair of large horns; then took three pins out of her garment and stuck them through and through, and put the figure to roast and melt at the fire. What a silly piece of spite! Yet it is impossible not to laugh when one sees it done." Imagine the feelings of the First Gentleman in Europe when such pranks were whispered to him!

For my own part, I fancy Caroline was innocent of any infidelity to her unhappy husband. But that is neither here nor there. Her behaviour was certainly not above suspicion. It fully justified him in trying to establish a case for her divorce. When, at length, she went abroad, her vagaries were such that the whole of her English suite left her, and we hear of her travelling about the Holy Land attended by another family, named Bergami. When her husband succeeded to the throne, and her name was struck out of the liturgy, she despatched expostulations in absurd English to Lord Liverpool. Receiving no answer, she decided to return and claim her right to be crowned Queen of England. Whatever the unhappy lady did, she always was ridiculous. One cannot but smile as one reads of her posting along the French roads in a yellow travelling-chariot drawn by cart-horses, with a retinue that included an alderman, a reclaimed lady-in-waiting, an Italian Count, the eldest son of the alderman, and "a fine little female child, about three years old, whom her Majesty, in conformity with her benevolent practices on former occasions, had adopted." The breakdown of her impeachment, and her acceptance of an income, formed a fitting anti-climax to the terrible absurdities of her position. She died from the effects of a chill caught when she was trying vainly to force a way to her husband's coronation. Unhappy woman! Our sympathy for her is not misplaced. Fate wrote her a most tremendous tragedy, and she played it in tights. Let us pity her, but not forget to pity her husband, the King, also. It is another common accusation against George that he was an undutiful and unfeeling son. If this was so, it is certain that not all the blame is to be laid upon him alone. There is more than one anecdote which shows that King George disliked his eldest son, and took no trouble to conceal his dislike, long before the  
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boy had been freed from his tutors. It was the coldness of his father and the petty restrictions he loved to enforce that first drove George to seek the companionship of such men as the Duke of Cumberland and the Duc d'Orléans, each of whom were quick to inflame his impressionable mind to angry resentment. Yet when Margaret Nicholson attempted the life of the King, the Prince immediately posted off from Brighton that he might wait upon his father at Windsor—a graceful act of piety that was rewarded by his father's refusal to see him. Hated by the Queen, who at this time did all she could to keep her husband and his son apart, surrounded by intriguers, who did all they could to set him against his father, George seems to have behaved with great discretion. In the years that follow, I can conceive no position more difficult than that in which he found himself every time his father relapsed into lunacy. That he should have by every means opposed those who through jealousy stood between him and the regency was only natural. It cannot be said that at any time did he show anxiety to rule, so long as there was any immediate chance of the King's recovery. On the contrary, all impartial seers of that chaotic Court agreed that the Prince bore himself throughout the intrigues, wherein he himself was bound to be, in a notably filial way.

There are many things that I regret in the career of George IV., and what I most of all regret is the part that he played in the politics of the period. Englishmen to-day have at length decided that royalty shall not set foot in the political arena. I do not despair that some day we shall place politics upon a sound commercial basis, as they have already done in America and France, or leave them entirely in the hands of the police, as they do in Russia. It is horrible to think that under our existing *régime* all the men of noblest blood and highest intellect should

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waste their time in the sordid atmosphere of the House of Commons, listening for hours to nonentities talking nonsense, or searching enormous volumes to prove that somebody said something some years ago that does not quite tally with something he said the other day, or standing tremulous before the whips in the lobbies and the scorpions in the constituencies. In the political machine are crushed and lost all our best men. That Mr. Gladstone did not choose to be a cardinal is a blow under which the Roman Catholic Church still staggers. In Mr. Chamberlain Scotland Yard missed its smartest detective. What a fine voluptuary might Lord Rosebery have been! It is a platitude that the country is ruled best by the permanent officials, and I look forward to the time when Mr. Keir Hardie shall hang his cap in the hall of No. 10 Downing Street, and a Conservative working man shall lead her Majesty's Opposition. In the lifetime of George, politics were not a whit finer than they are to-day. I feel a genuine indignation that he should have wasted so much of tissue in mean intrigues about ministries and bills. That he should have been fascinated by that splendid fellow, Fox, is quite right. That he should have thrown himself with all his heart into the storm of the Westminster election is most natural. But it is in veridical sad to find him, long after he had reached man's estate, indulging in back-stair intrigues with Whigs and Tories. It is, of course, absurd to charge him with deserting his first friends, the Whigs. His love and fidelity were given, not to the Whigs, but to the men who led them. Even after the death of Fox, he did, in misplaced piety, do all he could for Fox's party. What wonder that, when he found he was ignored by the Ministry that owed its existence to him, he turned his back upon that sombre couple, the "Lords G. and G.," whom he had always hated, and went over to the Tories? Among the  
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Tories he hoped to find men who would faithfully perform their duties and leave him leisure to live his own beautiful life. I regret immensely that his part in politics did not cease here. The state of the country and of his own finances, and also, I fear, a certain love that he had imbibed for political manipulation, prevented him from standing aside. How useless was all the finesse he displayed in the long-drawn question of Catholic Emancipation! How lamentable his terror of Lord Wellesley's rude dragooning! And is there not something pitiable in the thought of the Regent at a time of ministerial complications lying prone on his bed with a sprained ankle, and taking, as was whispered, in one day as many as seven hundred drops of laudanum? Some said he took these doses to deaden the pain. But others, and among them his brother Cumberland, declared that the sprain was all a sham. I hope it was. The thought of a voluptuary in pain is very terrible. In any case, I cannot but feel angry, for George's own sake and that of his kingdom, that he found it impossible to keep further aloof from the wearisome troubles of political life. His wretched indecision of character made him an easy prey to unscrupulous ministers, while his extraordinary diplomatic powers and almost extravagant tact made them, in their turn, an easy prey to him. In these two processes much of his genius was uselessly spent. I must confess that he did not quite realise where his duties ended. He wished always to do too much. If you read his repeated appeals to his father that he might be permitted to serve actively in the British army against the French, you will acknowledge that it was through no fault of his own that he did not fight. It touches me to think that in his declining years he actually thought that he had led one of the charges at Waterloo. He would often describe the whole scene as it appeared to him at that supreme moment,

moment, and refer to the Duke of Wellington, saying, "Was it not so, Duke?" "I have often heard you say so, your Majesty," the old soldier would reply, grimly. I am not sure that the old soldier was at Waterloo himself. In a room full of people he once referred to the battle as having been won upon the playing-fields of Eton. This was certainly a most unfortunate slip, seeing that all historians are agreed that it was fought on a certain field situate a few miles from Brussels.

In one of his letters to the King, craving for a military appointment, George urges that, whilst his next brother, the Duke of York, commanded the army, and the younger branches of the family were either generals or lieutenant-generals, he, who was Prince of Wales, remained colonel of dragoons. And herein, could he have known it, lay the right limiting of his life. As royalty was and is constituted, it is for the younger sons to take an active part in the services, whilst the eldest son is left as the ruler of Society. Thousands and thousands of guineas were given by the nation that the Prince of Wales, the Regent, the King, might be, in the best sense of the word, ornamental. It is not for us, at this moment, to consider whether Royalty, as a wholly Pagan institution, is not out of place in a community of Christians. It is enough that we should inquire whether the god whom our grandfathers set up and worshipped and crowned with offerings, gave grace to his worshippers.

That George was a moral man, in our modern sense, I do not for one moment pretend. When he died there were found in one of his cabinets more than a hundred locks of women's hair. Some of these were still plastered with powder and pomatum, others were mere little golden curls, such as grow low down upon a girl's neck, others were streaked with grey. The whole of this collection subsequently passed into the hands of Adam, the famous Scotch henchman

henchman of the Regent, and in his family, now resident in Glasgow, it is treasured as an heirloom. I myself have been privileged to look at all these locks of hair, and I have seen a *clairvoyante* take them one by one, and, pinching them between her lithe fingers, tell of the love that each symbolised. I have heard her tell of long rides by night, of a boudoir hung with grass-green satin, and of a tryst at Windsor; of one, the wife of a hussar at York, whose little lap-dog used to bark angrily whenever the Regent came near his mistress; of a milk-maid who, in her great simpleness, thought that her child would one day be king of England; of an arch-duchess with blue eyes, and a silly little flautist from Portugal; of women that were wantons and fought for his favour, great ladies that he loved dearly, girls that gave themselves to him humbly. If we lay all pleasures at the feet of our prince, we can scarcely hope he will remain virtuous. Indeed, we do not wish our prince to be an exemplar of godliness, but a perfect type of happiness. It may be foolish of us to insist upon apolaustic happiness, but that is the kind of happiness that we can ourselves, most of us, best understand, and so we offer it to our ideal. In Royalty we find our Bacchus, our Venus.

Certainly George was, in the practical sense of the word, a fine king. His wonderful physique, his wealth, his brilliant talents, he gave them all without stint to Society. His development from the time when, at Madame Cornely's, he gallivanted with rips and demireps, to the time when he sat, a stout and solitary old king, fishing in the artificial pond at Windsor, was beautifully ordered. During his life he indulged himself to the full in all the delights that life could offer him. That he should have, in his old age, suddenly abandoned his career of vigorous enjoyment is, I confess, rather surprising. The royal voluptuary generally remains young to the last. No one ever tires of pleasure. It is the pursuit of  
pleasure,

pleasure, the trouble to grasp it, that makes us old. Only the soldiers who enter Capua with wounded feet leave it demoralised. And yet George, who never had to wait or fight for a pleasure, most certainly broke up long before his death. I can but attribute this to the constant persecution to which he was subjected by duns and ministers, parents and wives.

Not that I regret the manner in which he spent his last years. On the contrary, I think it was exceedingly cosy. I like to think of the King, at Windsor, lying a-bed all the morning in his darkened room, with all the newspapers scattered over his quilt, and a little decanter of the favourite cherry-brandy within easy reach. I like to think of him sitting by his fire in the afternoon and hearing his ministers asking for him at the door and piling another log upon the fire, as he hears them sent away by his servant. After all, he had lived his life; he had lived more fully than any other man.

And it is right that we should remember him first as a voluptuary. Only let us note that his nature never became, as do the natures of most voluptuaries, corroded by a cruel indifference to the happiness of others. When all the town was agog for the *fête* to be given by the Regent in honour of the French King, Sheridan sent a forged card of invitation to Romeo Coates, the half-witted dandy, who used at this time to walk about in absurd ribbons and buckles, and was the butt of all the streetsters. When the poor fellow arrived at the entrance of Carlton House, proud as a peacock, he was greeted with a tremendous cheer from the by-standing mob, but when he came to the lacqueys he was told that his card was a hoax, and was sent about his business. The tears were rolling down his cheeks as he shambled back into the street. The Regent heard later in the evening of this sorry joke, and next day despatched a kindly-worded message, in which he prayed that  
Mr. Coates

Mr. Coates would not refuse to come and "view the decorations, nevertheless." Though he does not appear to have treated his inferiors with that extreme servility that is now in vogue, George was beloved by the whole of his household, and many are the little tales that are told to illustrate the kindness and consideration he showed to his valets and his jockeys and his stable-boys. That from time to time he dropped certain of his favourites is no cause for blaming him. Remember that a Great Personage, like a great genius, is dangerous to his fellow-creatures. The favourites of Royalty live in an intoxicant atmosphere. They become unaccountable for their behaviour. Either they get beyond themselves, and, like Brummel, forget that the King, their friend, is also their master; or they outrun the constable, and go bankrupt, or cheat at cards in order to keep up their position, or do some other foolish thing that makes it impossible for the King to favour them more. Remember, too, that old friends are generally the refuge of unsociable persons, and how great must be the temptation besetting the head of Society to form fresh friendships, when all the cleverest and most charming persons in the land are standing ready, like supers at the wings, to come on and please him. At Carlton House there was a constant succession of wits. Minds were preserved for the Prince of Wales, as coverts are preserved for him to-day. For him Sheridan would say his best bon-mot, and Theodore Hook contrive his most practical jokes, his swiftest chansonette. And Fox would talk, as only he could, of Liberty and of Patriotism, and Byron would look more than ever like Isidore de Lara as he recited his own bad verses, and Sir Walter Scott would "pour out with an endless generosity his store of old-world learning, kindness, and humour." Of such men George was a splendid patron. He did not merely sit in his chair, gaping princely at their wit and their wisdom, but quoted with the

scholars

scholars, and argued with the statesmen, and jested with the wits. Doctor Burney, an impartial observer, says that he was amazed by the knowledge of music that the Regent displayed in a half-hour's discussion over the wine. Croker says that "the Prince and Scott were the two most brilliant story-tellers, in their several ways, he had ever happened to meet. Both exerted themselves, and it was hard to say which shone the most." The Prince seems indeed to have been a fine conversationalist, with a wide range of knowledge and great humour. We, who have come at length to look upon stupidity as one of the most sacred prerogatives of Royalty, can scarcely realise that, if George's birth had been never so humble, he would have been known to us as a fine scholar and wit or as a connoisseur of the arts. It is pleasing to think of his love for the Flemish school of painting, for Wilkie and Sir Thomas Lawrence. The splendid portraits of foreign potentates that hang in the Banqueting Room at Windsor bear witness to his sense of the canvas. In his later years he exerted himself strenuously in raising the tone of the drama. His love of the classics never left him. We know he was fond of quoting those incomparable poets, Homer, at great length, and that he was prominent in the "papyrus-craze." Indeed, he inspired Society with a love of something more than mere pleasure, a love of the "humaner delights." He was a giver of tone. The bluff, disgusting ways of the Tom and Jerry period gave way to those florid graces that are still called Georgian.

A pity that George's predecessor was not a man, like the Prince Consort, of strong chastening influence! Then might the bright flamboyance which George gave to Society have made his reign more beautiful than any other—a real renaissance. But he found London a wild city of taverns and cock-pits, and the grace which in the course of years he gave to his subjects never really entered  
into

into them. The cock-pits were gilded and the taverns painted with colour, but the heart of the city was vulgar, even as before. The simulation of higher things did indeed give the note of a very interesting period, but how shallow that simulation was, and how merely it was due to George's own influence, we may see in the light of what happened after his death. The good that he had done died with him. The refinement he had laid upon vulgarity fell away, like enamel from withered cheeks. It was only George himself who had made the sham endure. The Victorian Era came soon, and the angels rushed in and drove the nymphs away and hung the land with reps.

I have often wondered whether it was with a feeling that his influence would be no more than life-long, that George allowed Carlton House, that dear structure, the very work of his life and symbol of his being, to be rased. I wish that Carlton House were still standing. I wish we could still walk through those corridors, whose walls were "crusted with ormolu," and parquet-floors were "so glossy that, were Narcissus to come down from heaven, he would, I maintain, need no other mirror for his *beauté*." I wish that we could see the pier-glasses and the girandoles and the twisted sofas, the fauns foisted upon the ceiling and the rident goddesses along the wall. These things would make George's memory dearer to us, help us to a fuller knowledge of him. I am glad that the Pavilion still stands here in Brighton. Its trite lawns and cheeky minarets have taught me much. As I write this essay, I can see them from my window. Last night I sat there in a crowd of vulgar people, whilst a band played us tunes. Once I fancied I saw the shade of a swaying figure and of a wine-red face.